

For freedom, we've been set free

 [montrosepress.com/news/for-freedom-we-ve-been-set-free/article_9020ec6e-9fa0-11e9-b35d-](https://montrosepress.com/news/for-freedom-we-ve-been-set-free/article_9020ec6e-9fa0-11e9-b35d-4fd886ec238f.html)

4fd886ec238f.html
Karen Winkel

July 5,
2019

When the Fourth of July rolls around every year, I'm reminded of a line from a letter the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Galatia: "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

The Fourth of July is our time to celebrate and give thanks for our American freedoms, hard won and regularly defended. As precious as these freedoms are though, without inward freedom — the kind that comes from a mature, committed faith — we can live in bondage and not even know it.

New to a pastorate years ago, a church member called and confided something concerning. I hurried over so that she could have my full attention. She and her husband were typical Americans — they had prospered, bought a comfortable home, and came and went as they pleased. Like you and me, they enjoyed countless freedoms as citizens of the world's greatest nation.

And yet, as this woman told me her story, it was obvious she was enslaved to a past she could not change. Memory was holding her prisoner and, as I would discover, as much as she insisted she wanted to be free of its grip, she found a certain comfort in being held prisoner by her story. Even as I held open the door to her inward cell, even as I invited her to step into the light of a new day, she quietly refused. She was both the prisoner and the guard.

Every spiritual tradition, through its writings and rituals, holds out ways for its adherents to live lives marked by true freedom. In my tradition, the keys to liberation fill the pages of both the Hebrew and the Christian scriptures. The call to extend care to the stranger, a constant theme in the Hebrew scriptures, frees us from ignorance and indifference as we discover that those who are foreign, those who are unknown to us, are indeed worthy of our kindness and generosity because they, too, are children of the Living God.

From the Christian scriptures, I hear in Jesus' admonition to forgive not just once but seventy times seven times, a reliable (but not always easy) pathway to liberation of heart and mind.

Similarly, Jesus steers us away from worrying about tomorrow because he knows how easily our "what ifs" cheat us of true aliveness today.

Those in the know tell us that of all the things Jesus said, “be not afraid” is the most common. We all know what it’s like to be caught in the grip of fearfulness, and how easily we allow our thoughts and attitudes to become distorted. When fear talks, we tend to believe it. Thing is, fear is often wrong. I think now about how our Christian nation allowed its own gentle, harmless citizens to be rounded up and held in internment camps during World War II because they were of Japanese extraction. Rampant fears are causing a similar scandal on our southern border as we separate families and do so in inhumane, unconscionable ways. Then and now, fear cheats us of the freedom to live as Christ would have us live, as people of compassion and maturity.

As our nation celebrates its independence this weekend, we would be wise to remember that as marvelous as our independence is, as important as our personal freedoms are, we are not truly free until and unless our hearts and minds are free, and others are free as well. We are, after all, interdependent--no one is truly free until all God’s children are also free.

Karen Winkel is the pastor of Community Spirit UCC.